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ABSTRACT

State strategies used to build constituencies and expand the resource base of the child care systems they are developing will be an important contribution to the success of welfare reform. This report, from a 1996 Child Care Action Campaign national audioconference, describes the innovative strategies used to strengthen leadership, expand community participation, and increase investments in child care in Colorado and Washington. The report notes that Colorado's efforts involve a high-level business commission and a grass roots movement, each operating independently of the other but in mutually reinforcing ways, and have mobilized new child care advocates whose legislative victories range from an income-tax check-off for investments in child care quality to an expansion of preschool capacity to restoring the dependent care tax credit to families. The report includes the recommendations of the Colorado Business Commission on Child Care Financing, which had direct impact on the decisions of a committee on welfare reform in the Colorado legislature. Also noted are the efforts of the Colorado Children's Campaign, which developed advocacy training around the children's agenda and personalized the need for better child care through a doll project to build support for child care solutions. The report then describes efforts in Washington, where coordinated priority-setting and budget-negotiating among child care advocates and agency officials are the essence of an effective legislative strategy that has kept child care at the forefront of welfare reform proposals, increased state-funded subsidies for low-income working families, and increased state funding for child care training and licensing activities. This report includes a description of the Washington State Child Care Coordinating Committee. (KB)

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Influencing Welfare and Child Care Reform: Strategies from Colorado and Washington

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Child Care Action Campaign

Overview

State child care administrators and advocates are key players in implementing the most momentous social policy changes in six decades: the transformation of federal safety net programs for poor families into state-run programs that set time limits on benefits and require welfare recipients to work. Although child care is now broadly recognized as a linchpin of this sweeping reform, the critical need for *good quality* child care—as part of a two-generation strategy to break the cycle of poverty and dependence—is far less understood and supported. Whether welfare reform will undermine child care quality or whether it will open the doors of opportunity for expanding good programs depends, in part, on the speed and efficiency with which states share results of effective new policies and programs. Equally important will be the strategies that states employ to build constituencies and expand the resource base of the child care systems they are developing.

Innovative strategies to strengthen leadership, expand community participation, and increase investments in child care have recently evolved in the two states, Colorado and Washington, that were featured on a CCAC audioconference. In Colorado, a high-level business commission and a grass roots movement, each operating independently of the other but in mutually reinforcing ways, have mobilized new child care advocates whose legislative victories range from an income-tax check-off for investments in child care quality to an expansion of preschool capacity. In Washington, coordinated priority-setting and budget-negotiating among child care advocates and agency officials is the essence of an effective legislative strategy that has kept child care at the forefront of welfare reform and hiked state-funded subsidies for low-income working families, in spite of stiff budgetary constraints.

To describe these initiatives, CCAC invited three presenters to participate in a national audioconference on June 17, 1996: Anna Jo Haynes, executive director of Mile High Child Care in Denver; Grace Hardy, Colorado Director of Child Care; and Lonnie Johns-Brown, a lobbyist for the Washington Association for the Education of Young Children (WAEYC) and an ex-officio member of the Washington State Child Care Coordinating Committee. The conference was moderated by Barbara Reisman; CCAC executive director. Two hundred and seventy people participated.

As these presentations show, even in difficult times, and sometimes because of them, collaboration between advocates and administrators can open doors to creative action to expand child care constituencies, increase child care funding, engage business leaders, and catalyze grass roots action. Other states will do well to consult and adapt lessons learned by innovators in Colorado and Washington.

Participants in the CCAC Audioconference

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Issue Brief

Lance Dronkers
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A Business Commission and a Grass Roots Movement Propel Child Care Legislation in Colorado

In early 1995, in spite of the drastic overhaul of the federal welfare system proposed by a newly elected Congress, Colorado Governor Roy Romer and his administration held off on state-level reform of cash assistance in order to "spend their energies on building the infrastructure for child care," according to Grace Hardy. This important choice created a policy context favorable to the rise of a new initiative in child care financing and the strengthening of child care advocacy by the Colorado Children's Campaign.

Colorado Business Commission on Child Care Financing. In 1995, anticipating a dramatic increase in child care demand due to federal welfare reform, Governor Romer appointed a commission of 25 business leaders to examine financing structures for child care and early education from a "business point of view." The commission members were asked to contribute their expertise by framing financial questions accurately and recommending solutions that would involve a range of public and private actions. Hardy emphasizes the importance of asking business for leadership first, rather than financial support.

After completing a five-month review of the child care industry, welfare reform, and issues of child care supply and quality, the business commission unanimously concluded that "access to quality, affordable child care in Colorado is a fundamental right of children and it is the responsibility of parents and society to guarantee that right." Although child care experts and administrators provided input to the commission, they effectively "ceded control over the results," which Hardy considers essential to the commission's influence. In its report, the commission offered 12 recommendations for expanding child care of good quality, defined as "care that allows parents to work without distraction, reduces absenteeism and turnover, helps single mothers become independent of welfare, and helps children grow and develop." (See box on page 4.)

The commission's recommendations had direct and immediate impact on the Colorado legislature—by influencing the deliberations and decisions of an interim committee on welfare reform. This interim committee was constituted in 1995 to develop a proposal for a state welfare reform plan that would "meet the needs of families." The interim committee held extensive hearings on a range of welfare issues during approximately the same period that the business commission was conducting its study.

The interim committee first requested the testimony of parents, who described the struggles of welfare recipients who, after taking jobs, lose cash assistance and other benefits and cannot achieve economic independence without reliable and affordable child care. The interim committee concluded that child care was the number one issue facing welfare reform planners and determined that more information was needed in order to develop child care proposals.

To fill this information gap, agency officials and child care advocates were asked for testimony. Yet the most powerfully persuasive input came from outside the child care field, in the person of Doug Price, president of the First Bank of Denver and chair of the business commission. Price spoke to the committee about the commission's careful inquiry into child care financing. After hearing Price, reports Hardy, the interim committee concluded that child care quality should be a top priority and that poor quality care, no matter how plentiful, would not meet families' or employers' needs.

Because of Price's testimony, two of the business commission's recommenda-

The business Commission concluded that access to quality, affordable child care in Colorado is a fundamental right of children and it is the responsibility of parents and society to guarantee that right.

—COLORADO BUSINESS COMMISSION ON CHILD CARE FINANCING

Colorado Business Commission Recommendations for Child Care

In May of 1995, Colorado Governor Roy Romer appointed a 25-member Business Commission on Child Care Financing. After thorough research, discussion and deliberation, the Commission was not only ready to advocate the following 12 recommendations engendered from their five-month investigation, but each member left with a sincere understanding of the complexities and urgencies of child care.

1. Establish model planning and zoning programs designed to increase and impact the supply of child care.
2. Develop and distribute a business-oriented resource guide describing child care employee benefit options.
3. Design, implement, and distribute a packet of model child care programs that can be locally replicated or adapted by employers of varying sizes and organization structures.
4. Establish a multi-bank community development corporation that will provide loans and other financial assistance to child care providers.
5. Develop and distribute a child care consumer guide for parents.
6. Restructure the current Colorado enterprise zone child care contribution program to improve the availability, quality, and affordability of child care.

   Expand the current enterprise zone structure to include all of Colorado for child care contributions.

   Transfer to the Colorado Department of Human Services the responsibility for administering the expanded Child Care Contribution Program.

   Initiate Legislation to revise the Colorado tax laws to maximize corporate and individual child care contributions and to allow negotiable securities donated to the Child Care Contribution Program to be treated as cash contributions instead of in-kind.
7. Initiate legislation to establish a voluntary child care check-off on Colorado state income tax returns to fund quality enhancement in licensed child care facilities through a dedicated funding source.
8. Initiate a refundable child care income tax credit for Colorado families to significantly assist them in paying for licensed child care.
9. Initiate a change in property tax assessment rates to allow child care facilities to be taxed at the residential rate rather than the commercial rate.
10. Develop policies that provide for the utilization of existing public educational buildings for child care programs.
11. Convene a governor's statewide summit on business and child care.
12. Create a permanent business and child care commission.

tions were quickly enacted into law in 1996. The first one was the creation of a voluntary check-off on the Colorado personal income tax form for contributions to a child care fund that will make investments in training and other child care quality improvements. The second was the restoration of the dependent care tax credit to families, which had been eliminated in 1988, to help families pay for licensed child care.

Colorado Children's Movement. A second strong influence on the Colorado legislature was the Colorado Children's Campaign, which was the active force behind the creation of a bipartisan committee that moved several additional pieces of legislation in 1995 and 1996. Created in 1985, the Children's Campaign expanded dramatically in the early 90's, when it launched the Colorado Children's Movement. As recalled by Anna Jo Haynes, the movement was the brainchild of advocates and administrators who "decided that it was really the grass roots that we needed to talk with." The first major goal was to involve clergy by organizing an interfaith service to begin the grass roots dialogue. The service was attended by 1,200 people.

Following that success, "we decided that people really didn't know how to be advocates and that advocacy training was critically important," Haynes explains. Therefore, the campaign developed advocacy training around the children's agenda. In each of the three scheduled sessions, over 150 prospective child advocates participated. With a new population of child advocates trained

and extremely upbeat about the potential for change, the stage was set for the doll project, which not only transformed advocacy in Colorado but also influenced other states and national advocacy campaigns.

The idea behind the doll project was simple and direct: Personalize the urgent need for better child care through the use of large cardboard dolls, each bearing the story of a different child and placed in public places, like park benches, to attract attention and build support for child care solutions. Starting off with 150 story-bearing cardboard dolls in 1993, the project quickly spread. By 1995, 24,000 dolls were produced and displayed in public spaces by citizens in 100 cities across the state. This extraordinary increase in dolls signaled both Colorado's growing recognition of the importance of children's issues and the spiraling membership of the campaign.

After three years, the doll project of the Children's Movement gave the Children's Campaign a broad-based constituency ready to flex its muscle in the legislative arena. Campaign leaders decided to push for the formation of a bipartisan committee of legislators to address children's issues and introduce children's bills. The timing seemed right because during that period the interim committee was holding hearings on welfare reform and the business committee was studying child care financing.

The president of the Children's Campaign approached and gained the support of the chair of the joint budget committee, Haynes relates. Following the meeting, "a letter was sent to legislators announcing the creation of this committee, and 20 legislators joined."

The ad hoc committee proved extraordinarily active and drafted 20 new bills shortly after its formation. "Although those got mowed down a bit, I think the important thing is that this ad hoc committee continues to meet," notes Haynes. "We have a number of bills really ready to go."

Among its notable successes, the ad hoc committee achieved its goal of earmarking for young children's programs 20 percent of the $7 million recently allocated to community-based crime prevention activities. Even more unexpectedly, the Colorado legislature also agreed to create places for 2,000 additional children in the Colorado preschool program.

Multi-tiered Coordination among Advocates and Administrators in Washington Moves the Child Care Agenda

Washington state's recent accomplishments in child care stem from a creative response to a difficult fiscal climate. In 1994, Washington state voters passed a state initiative limiting how much state revenue can be spent annually. This constraint on expenditures, coupled with Washington's lack of a personal income tax, increases pressure on child care advocates and administrators to set clear priorities. In response, Lonnie Johns-Brown reports, "good working relationships have emerged among a wide variety of interest groups."

These working relationships are highly structured. Through a multi-tiered process, priorities are set, budget requests are constructed from the priorities, and legislative messages are the subject of clear and consistent lobbying. Each step in the process is facilitated by a different organization whose membership of children's advocates overlaps with the membership and leaders of the other involved organizations.

We are linked to the broader social services community...and we're able to agree on clear priorities, which the legislature hears over and over.

—LONNIE JOHNS-BROWN

The lead group for early childhood issues is Child Care Works for Washington. Its large and diverse membership includes large organizations such as Children's Alliance, WAEYC, and Children's Home Society; church groups such as the Catholic Conference and the Lutheran Conference; and many other organizations involved with children's issues. The primary annual goal of Child Care Works is to set funding and policy priorities for early childhood care and education.

After Child Care Works sets priorities, it passes its recommendations along to the Children's Budget Coalition. The coalition, whose membership is also drawn from the children's advocacy community, integrates the priorities recommended by Child Care Works with priorities recommended by other children's interest groups to create a broad-based children's budget proposal. "In the Children's Budget Coalition you have a huge variety of folks," comments Johns-Brown, "all of whom work together in our state capital of Olympia to promote the budget as a whole. The goal is to prevent the usual kind of thing you have when there's limited funding and groups are forced to argue, for example, whether child care is more important than immunization."

While the advocacy community is setting its priorities and creating its budget recommendations, the Child Care Coordinating Committee, created in 1988 by the state legislature, helps develop a focused legislative agenda. "The Child Care Coordinating Committee serves as a clearinghouse to bring officials from major state agencies together and to coordinate their work with input from early care and education advocates and business representatives," describes Johns-Brown. "This interface of advocates and administrators in the Child Care Coordinating Committee results in a healthy understanding, by all groups, of what the priorities should be."

Using a strategy that Johns-Brown describes as "interlocking membership," Child Care Works for Washington, the Children's Budget Coalition, and the Child Care Coordinating Committee are in constant communication with each other. Advocates know what priorities to rally around, their messages remain unified and clear, and their lobbying efforts strong. The hard work of coordinating such a diverse community, with many related but often separate goals, pays off, as shown by recent legislative victories.

Here's just one example: When welfare reform was proposed on a national level, many states produced their own versions of welfare reform. In Washington state, policy makers rapidly wrote several new bills with little preliminary discussion or debate. To complicate matters, at that time Washington had a Democratic Senate, a Republican House, and a Democratic governor. Initially, only the governor's proposal had strong child care provisions. Washington child care advocates had their work cut out for them.

Using the multi-tiered process described above, advocates and administrators developed agreement about two priorities: (1) child care is necessary for any welfare reform proposal to succeed, and (2) attention needs to be given to the waiting list for child care subsidies for employed families.

This coordination and unification of messages to the legislature paid off. Child care provisions were included in all of the legislative proposals for welfare reform that were introduced in 1996. Moreover, $9.8 million in new funding was appropriated to reduce the waiting list for child care for employed families, and

What is the Washington State Child Care Coordinating Committee (CCCC)?

CCCC

- Was created by the 1988 Legislature.
- Facilitates the coordination of child care and early childhood services.
- Reviews state child care/early childhood programs.
- Advises the legislature on improving child care/early childhood services and systems.
- Performs other functions to improve the availability and quality of child care/early childhood services.
- CCCC includes representatives of
- State agencies (Social and Health Services, Community Development, Labor and Industries, Trade and Economic Development, Revenue, Employment Security, Personnel, Health, and Public Instruction)
- Child care centers
- Family home child care
- Head Start
- Parents receiving subsidized child care
- Employer supported child care
- Businesses
- Resource and Referral agencies

Collaborating groups include:

- Washington Association for the Education of Young Children
- Child Care Works for Washington
- Crisis Nursery Consortium of Washington State
- Family Child Care Association
- School-Age Care Association

and others

$3.8 million was approved to expand the state's early childhood education program, which is the state version of Head Start.

Another achievement that resulted from good coordination among advocates and administrators was the recent increase of state funding for child care training and licensing activities. This victory occurred because of a prompt reaction to public concern about inadequate training and licensing of personnel in the child protection system. By pointing out to legislators and the public that training and licensing in child care are also essential measures for protecting child health and safety, child care advocates and administrators persuaded the legislature to put more funding into these activities.

Currently, Washington's advocacy community and administrators, seeking to strengthen their forces, would like to move in a direction similar to that taken in Colorado with the creation of a business commission on child care financing. Advocates at the University of Washington have pulled together a group of business leaders to begin the discussion of how to attract more private and public investment in early childhood care and education.

Much work remains to be done in Washington, says Johns-Brown. Every year state agencies spend right up to the limit, and any federal cuts make it more difficult to protect and expand child care investments. But Washington's strategy is clear and Johns-Brown believes the state will find the necessary answers: "We have a very strong advocacy community operating through the Child Care Coordinating Committee and through the Children's Budget Coalition. We are linked to the broader social services community so that we're not placed in the position of having to be played off against each other in tight budget times. We're able to agree on clear priorities, which the legislature hears over and over. And that has served us very well."

About the Child Care Action Campaign

Child Care Action Campaign (CCAC) is a national nonprofit advocacy organization whose goal is to improve the lives of children and their families by expanding the supply of good quality, affordable child care. Founded in 1983, headquartered in New York, and assisted by a panel of advisors in every state, CCAC uses its information resources and strategic skills to engage parents, policymakers, business leaders, government officials, and child care providers in improving child care and early education. Through its national conferences, business roundtables, and state forums, CCAC is a catalyst for change. CCAC has led national thinking in defining child care as a bottom line economic issue and as a fundamental component of welfare reform and education reform.

About CCAC's Family Support Watch (FSW)

As part of its mission to increase the availability of good quality, affordable child care programs, CCAC established the Family Support Watch (FSW), a project to monitor the implementation of the 1988 Family Support Act and ensure that eligible families have access to the child care guaranteed by the Act. Since 1989, FSW has engaged in a wide range of policy analysis and advocacy activities including issuing reports, testifying at public and Congressional hearings, communicating to the public in print and broadcast media, distributing outreach materials to parents, and convening state administrators, advocates, and leaders through national audioconferences. In short, CCAC has tried, wherever possible, to get out the message that child care is a crucial component of any welfare-to-work strategy and to work with state leaders to ensure that child care benefits are delivered to families.

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